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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Announces Commitment to Cleaning up South Side of Ellis Island

Gov. Christie Whitman today announced a \$265,000 commitment by the state Department of Corrections to use inmate labor for helping to clean up buildings on the south side of Ellis Island.

The soon-to-be-released, minimum-risk inmates are removing overgrown vegetation on neglected buildings under supervision of Department of Corrections officers. The inmates are part of the department's "Paying Communities Back" program which performs service projects that benefit New Jersey's communities.

"In saving these buildings, we preserve more than bricks and mortar. We preserve for the children of a new century the memories of those who came before us. What's more, we remind them - and ourselves - that there remains something very special about this Land of Liberty," she said.

The National Park Service is conducting a \$6.6 million stabilization project for 29 buildings that sit on the south side of Ellis Island. Gov. Whitman dedicated \$2 million in state funds to aid in the stabilization efforts in her fiscal year 2000 budget address. In 1998, the Supreme Court ruled that the majority of the island was situated in New Jersey.

The immigration center closed in 1954 and although the main building was preserved and turned into a museum in the 1980's, the other buildings have suffered from 45 years of neglect.

The inmates, working in two teams of ten inmates each, will remove the vegetation growing on and around the buildings which has caused damage to the exterior brick and stucco, wall openings, and roof. The Jersey City Incinerator Authority has agreed to remove the waste at no cost.

The \$6.6 project will merely stabilize the buildings to prevent further damage. The National Park Service expects overall rehabilitation efforts to cost more than \$200 million. Currently, two thirds of the island is closed to the public because of structural unsoundness.

"Now it's time to take care of the other buildings, including those that served as hospitals and contagious disease wards," Gov. Whitman said. "The hard work of our inmates will save the park service approximately \$265,000 - money that can instead be invested in other key aspects of the stabilization project."

Finn M.W. Caspersen, chair of the Governor's Advisory Committee on the Preservation and Use of Ellis Island, said the help of the Department of

Corrections has helped jump-start the stabilization.

"There is a long way to go towards restoring this national monument to its rightful heritage. It is clear that the only way we will succeed is to continue and expand the spirit of cooperation and commitment which has prevailed thus far between all levels of government, dedicated non-profit organizations and the public," Caspersen said.